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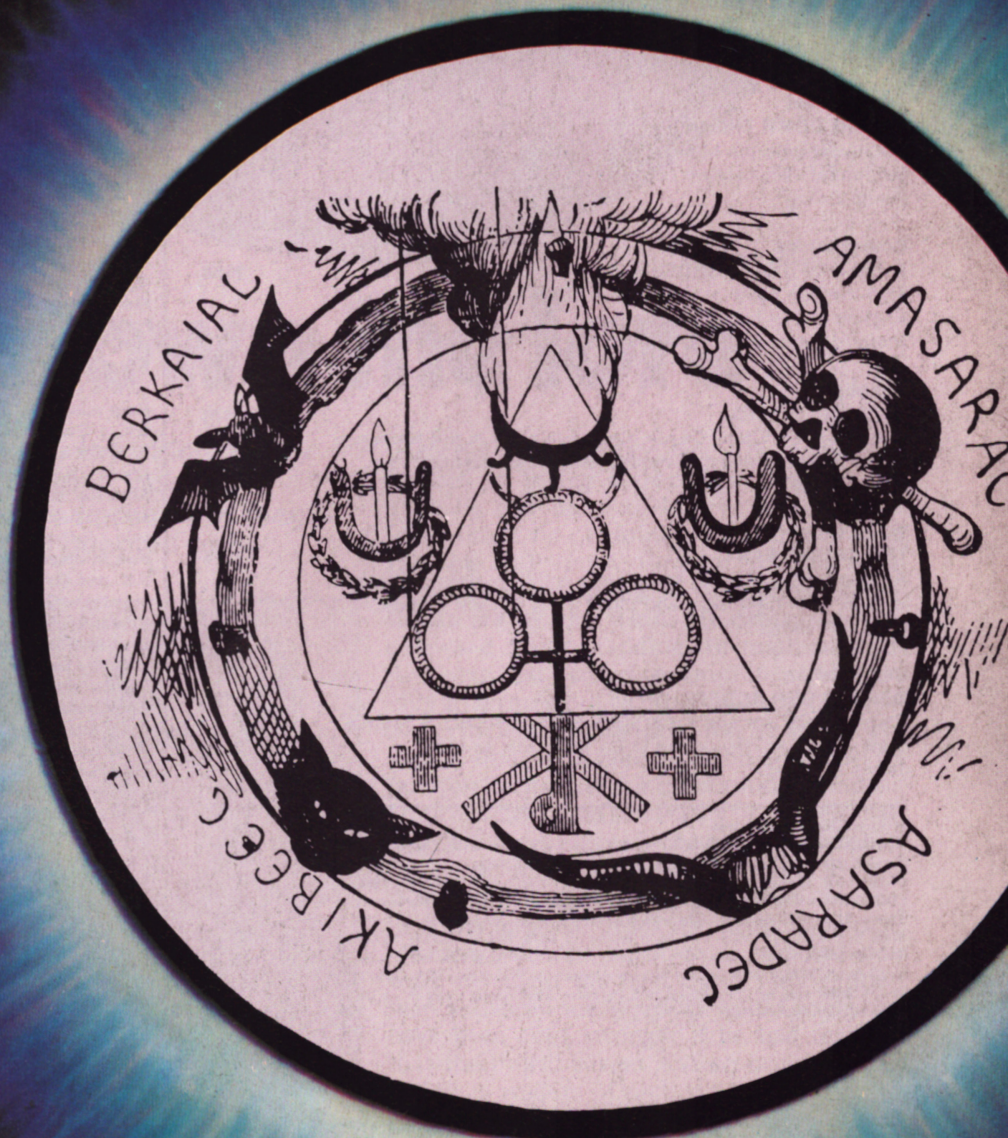
THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

129

Eliphas Levi
Atlantis in the Bahamas?
China's psychic children
The Thornton murders
'Invisible' UFOs



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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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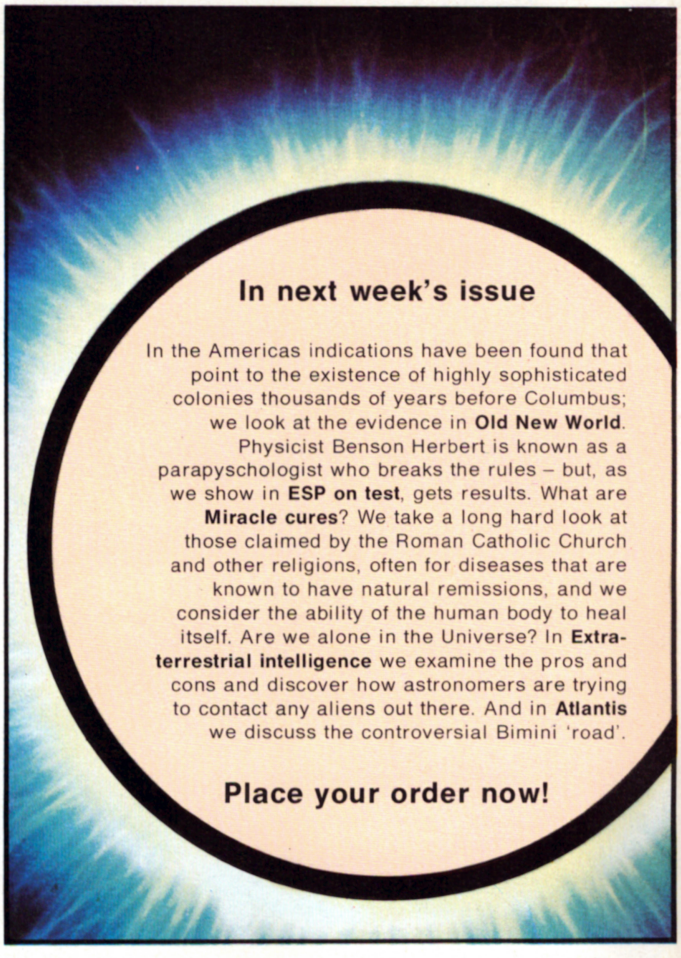
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Right: Alphonse-Louis Constant, better known as the magical writer Eliphas Levi, as a young man. Constantly searching for a cause, Levi had devoted himself to the Church, then to revolutionary politics, but it was only when he met the exiled Polish mystic J. M. Hoene-Wronski (below) that he found his life's work – to become the world's foremost ritual magician

Laying down the lore

Modern students of the occult often cite the 19th-century French writer Eliphas Levi as an authority. But, as FRANCIS KING points out, Levi's own background in magic was far from the scholarly work it was deemed to be

AT THE PRESENT day every great city of the Western world has a Polish community, men and women exiled from their homeland because of their opposition to the Polish government and its Russian masters. The situation was similar throughout much of the 19th century. Numbers of these exiles lived in Paris: some took refuge in political plotting, others in mystical dreams, seeing Poland as the 'Messiah nation', a sacrificial victim whose sufferings would redeem the rest of Europe.

Among these latter was J.M. Hoene-Wronski (1776–1853), perhaps the oddest dreamer of them all, the first occult teacher to inspire the French writer who called himself Eliphas Levi. Wronski was originally a soldier by profession, but abandoned the military life for philosophy and science and made his way to France, where he supported himself by taking mathematical pupils. By 1810 he had come to believe that he had 'discovered the Absolute' – in other words, that he had come, through reason, to a perfect understanding of the nature of ultimate reality and truth. He expressed this supposed 'understanding' in mathematical formulae that proved incomprehensible not only to laymen but to other mathematicians. Nevertheless, so convinced was he of his own genius that he visited London in order to petition Parliament for grants and subsidies. Here he made such a nuisance of himself that one distinguished mathematician, a member of the scientific committee known as the Board of Longitude, opined that 'in the interests of social order one must hope that Wronski will one night go to bed and not wake up again the next day.' This gentleman's distaste for Wronski would probably have been even stronger if he had realised that the Polish savant was an occultist and mystic, a student of such strange subjects as gnosticism and qabalism, who believed that

by means of mystical processes ordinary human beings could attain God-like powers.

In 1850 Wronski met Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810–1875), better known as Eliphas Levi, a hack journalist who had once trained for the priesthood but had lost his faith, dabbled in revolutionary politics and become disillusioned, and was looking for a new set of beliefs that would give meaning to a purposeless existence. To Levi – to use the name he adopted – Wronski expounded his doctrine of the Absolute, his belief that Poland was 'the Christ of Europe', his interpretations of the *qabalah* and other mystical systems, and his belief that, through the practice of ritual magic, men could attain semi-divinity.

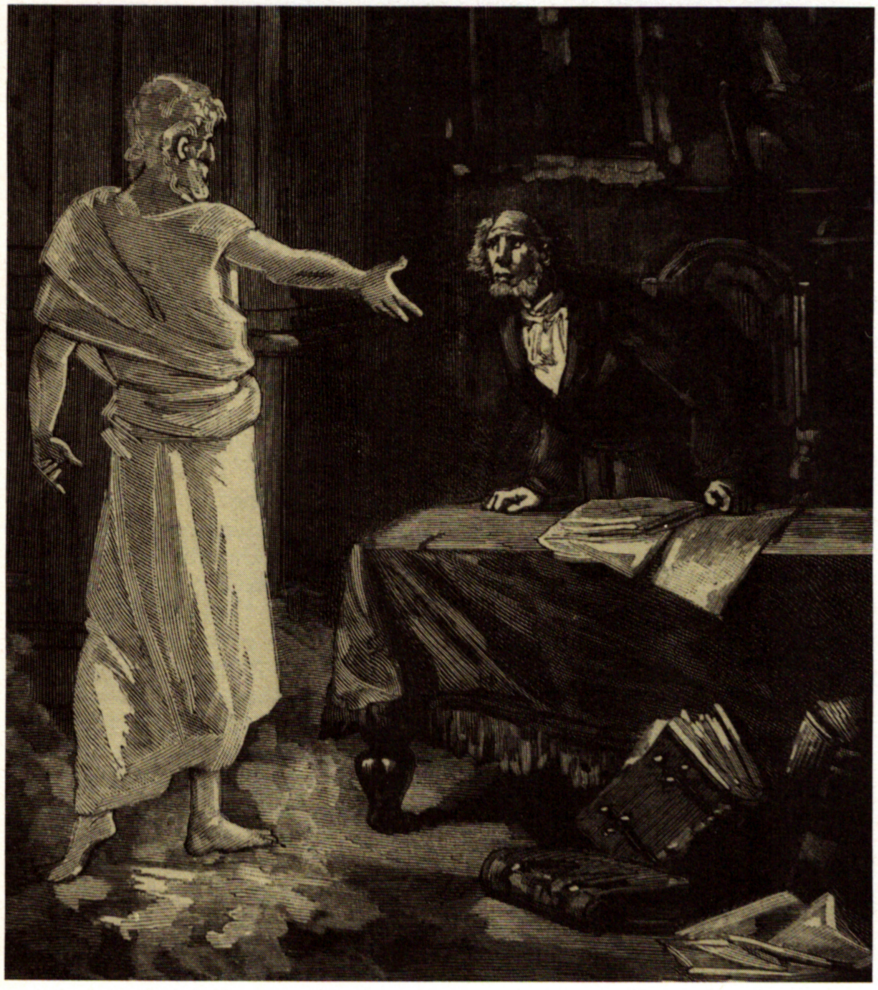
Levi was captivated. He threw himself into the study of all the 'occult sciences', from alchemy to cartomancy, from magic to astrology. He rifled the libraries of Paris for esoteric books and manuscripts, reading them voraciously, and spent many hours with obscure soothsayers, diviners, magicians and self-appointed prophets, hoping to extract wisdom from his long and often pointless conversations with them. He came to believe that the ancient texts of alchemy and magic were written in a symbolic code, and that if he could only break this code he would learn the ultimate secrets of the Universe and become the custodian of spiritual truths beside which the discoveries and interpretations of Wronski would pale into insignificance.

In 1853 Wronski died, mourned – but not deeply regretted – by Levi, who by this time believed that he had already surpassed his former master and was well on the way to receiving some great spiritual revelation. A year later, in 1854, he decided that his researches were sufficiently advanced for him to carry out an occult experiment – the 'evocation to visible appearance' of the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher and wonder-worker of the first century.

Levi recorded that he prefaced this rite by three weeks of preparation and purification – eating only vegetables, avoiding other people, and carrying on imaginary conversations with the long dead sage.

The preparations over, Levi, clad in white vestments and wearing on his head a wreath of vervain entwined with a golden chain, began the ceremony by lighting charcoal fires in two copper chafing dishes. On these he burned various types of incense, their heavy smoke designed to provide the material from which the spirit of the philosopher could build himself a 'body'. Levi began to read the words of the ritual he was employing. Then, as he stated:

> The smoke spread . . . floating above the altar . . . I heaped more fuel and



Below: Levi undertakes the supreme magical rite – the 'evocation to visible appearance' of the 1st-century sage, Apollonius of Tyana. After lengthy and peculiar preparations Levi evoked Apollonius three times on consecutive days in order to ask the spirit profound questions on the nature of the Universe. Apparently the apparition complied, but unfortunately Levi did not record the conversations

With due ceremony

Eliphas Levi, who was born in 1810, grew up and spent his adult life in a period characterised by an all-pervading romanticism – which often degenerated into a frantic search for the merely picturesque, or the abnormal.

By the time Levi was 30 the Romantic movement dominated the cultural life of France – and Levi was ensnared by it, being a man with a desperate need to believe; he could not face the world without holding up some ideological banner inscribed with 'the truth'. The nature of this 'truth' changed as Levi grew older; as an adolescent he found it in romanticised Catholicism, as a young man in an equally romanticised revolutionary Socialism, and for his last 20 years or so in a grossly distorted, 'picturesque' interpretation of the occult tradition of the Western world.

This was shaped by Levi's wide reading, uncritical acceptance of the assertions of unscholarly historians, and his remarkable capacity for self-deception (shared by the later occultist Aleister Crowley (see page 2081), who believed he was the reincarnation of Levi, whom he eclipsed in learning).

Levi's written statements regarding

perfume upon the chafing dishes. . . I beheld distinctly before the altar, the figure of a man of more than normal size. . . . Three times, with closed eyes, I invoked Apollonius. When I again looked there was a man in front of me, wrapped from head to foot in a shroud. . . . I experienced an abnormally cold sensation, and when I endeavoured to question the phantom I could not utter a syllable. I . . . pointed my magic sword at the figure, mentally commanding it to obey me. . . . The form became vague and suddenly vanished. I ordered it to return and presently felt, as it were, a breath close by me; something touched the hand with which I was holding the sword, and immediately my forearm became numb. I guessed that the sword displeased the spirit, and I placed its point downward, close by me, within the circle. . . . I experienced such a weakness in all my limbs, and a fainting sensation came so quickly over me, that I sat down, whereupon I fell into a profound lethargy accompanied by dreams of which I had only a confused recollection when I recovered consciousness. . . .

The spirit of Apollonius did not speak to Levi, but the answers to the two questions he had intended to ask it, one on behalf of a friend, one on his own account, came into his mind. The reply to the friend, who had asked about someone's health, was 'Death'; the answer to his own (unrecorded) question was similarly gloomy.

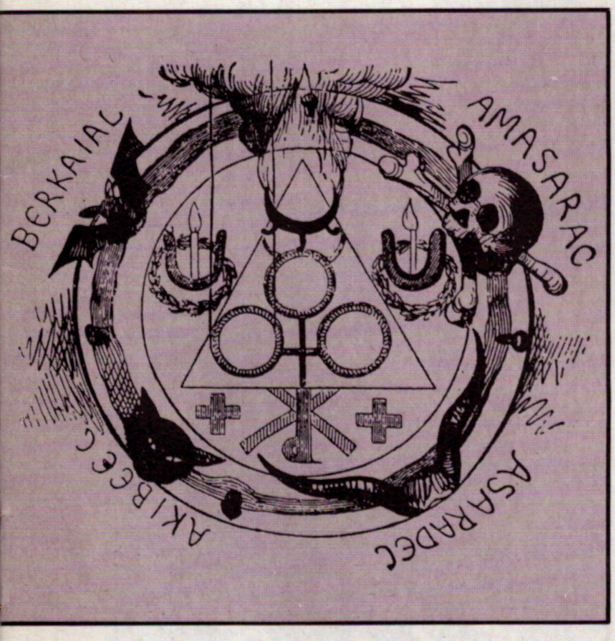
Very secret secrets

Over the next few days Levi twice more evoked Apollonius. Each time, claimed Levi, the sage appeared and gave profound philosophical answers to Levi's equally profound questions. Unfortunately the exact wording, of neither the questions propounded nor the answers received, was recorded, so it is impossible to estimate the truth of Levi's claim that Apollonius revealed secrets 'which might change, in a short time, the foundations and laws of society at large, if they became generally known'.

If the secrets were, indeed, as astonishing as Levi claimed it is rather remarkable that he proceeded to warn others against carrying out similar occult experiments. He wrote:

> . . . I regard the practice as destructive and dangerous. . . . I commend the greatest caution to those who propose devoting themselves to similar experiences; their result is intense exhaustion, and frequently a shock sufficient to occasion illness.

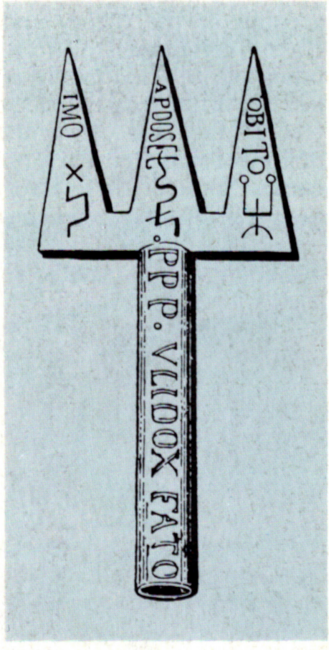
Not many months after his raising of the



the many surviving printed and manuscript *grimoires* – medieval and Renaissance textbooks of ritual magic (see page 2201) – typified his whole attitude. When he quoted from these works he did so selectively and inaccurately, picking out (and heavily amending) passages that were sufficiently romantic to read as though extracted from a particularly lurid Gothic novel. If no passages in any extant grimoire were sufficiently dramatic to suit his purposes he did not scruple to invent them.

Take, for example, Levi's description of the processes involved in 'infernal evocations' – the raising of the denizen's of hell to visible appearance. The sorcerer begins, said Levi, with 15 days of a curious dietary observance – getting totally drunk every five days on wine in which hemp and poppy have been infused and which has been strained through a cloth 'woven by a prostitute'. The actual evocation should be carried out in a haunted graveyard or 'the vaults of an abandoned convent' – both, significantly enough, popular settings for Gothic novels. Among the essential requirements for the ceremony were, claimed Levi, such items as 'the head of a black cat which had fed on human flesh for five days, four nails from the coffin of an executed criminal, and the horns of a goat that had experienced sexual intercourse with a young girl' (shown in a magical design, the Goetic circle, left). All this is very melodramatic, but almost none of it was actually derived from the grimoires that were its supposed sources.

Levi's imagination made his books very readable – but valueless as serious studies of the occult tradition.



Above: Levi's version of the 'trident of Paracelsus' to which he attributed extraordinary qabalistic significance. However his misreading of the ancient texts had led him astray – Paracelsus merely regarded the trident as a device to cure sexual impotence brought about by witchcraft

Left: Levi's design for the Great Seal of Solomon, sometimes known as the Double Triangle of Solomon. This shows the magician's acknowledgement of the duality of all things – with the good shown above and the evil below – and also the belief that each man reflects the Universe (the 'macrocosm') in himself (the 'microcosm'); thus fulfilling the laws of heaven as expressed in the magical formula 'As above, so below'

ghost of Apollonius to visible appearance Levi published a book entitled *The dogma of high magic*. In this and its sequel, *The ritual of high magic*, published two years later, Levi presented what he claimed to be an accurate account of the theory and practice of alchemy, ceremonial magic, divination and the other 'occult sciences'. In reality these treatises are often grossly inaccurate where matters of fact are concerned. Many of his definitive statements are, quite simply, erroneous. Some of these errors were probably the result of carelessness in the use of manuscripts and other primary sources – Levi was a widely, but not deeply, read man – others can be attributed to deliberate distortion for no other purpose than the production of exciting reading. A particularly gross example is provided by Levi's account of 'the Trident of Paracelsus', a three-pronged fork inscribed with various mystic symbols. Levi asserted that the three prongs represented both the Christian Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost and the alchemical elements (principles) of salt, sulphur and mercury. The trident expressed, Levi added:

> . . . the synthesis of the Trinity in Unity. . . . Paracelsus ascribed to it all the virtues which cabbalistic Hebrews attribute to the Name of Jehovah and the thaumaturgic [magical] properties of ABRACADABRA, used by the hierophants of Alexandria.

All this is unmitigated rubbish. Paracelsus certainly wrote of this trident; equally certainly he did not attribute to it all the virtues of 'the Name of Jehovah' – he regarded it as a device to be used for the cure of sexual impotence brought about by witchcraft. According to Paracelsus those inflicted in this way should make a trident from an old horseshoe 'on the Day of Venus and in the Hour of Saturn', inscribe it with various occult symbols, and conceal it in the bed of a running stream. 'By this means,' wrote Paracelsus, 'thou shalt be delivered in nine days and the person that has brought this mischief upon thee shall get something himself in that place [the genitals].' All this is very interesting, no doubt – but it is a long way from Levi's 'synthesis of the Trinity in Unity' and 'the thaumaturgic properties of Abracadabra'.

Designs upon the Tarot

On occasion Levi did more than distort the facts – he invented them to suit his purpose. Thus, for example, he wanted to prove that the Tarot cards (see page 1966) were known to, and employed by, occultists of the 16th and 17th centuries. He therefore specifically stated that there were references to the Tarot in the writings of such men as Abbot Trithemius, the 16th century scholar, and Knorr von Rosenroth, the 17th century qabalist. In truth there are no such references.

Inaccuracies of this sort flawed all the literary work of Levi; anyone who looks for reliable accounts of the history of Western occultism and the techniques employed by its devotees must seek elsewhere than in the writings of the French magician.

Nevertheless, Levi's *theories* as to how magic supposedly works cannot be neglected. For not only are they interesting in their own right, but they have inspired whole generations of occultists, including H.P. Blavatsky (see page 2061) and the magician

Aleister Crowley (see page 2081).

As far as Levi was concerned three fundamental theories – which he called 'dogmas' – explained all allegedly supernatural phenomena, from miraculous healings apparently induced by holy relics to the table-turning of Spiritualist mediums.

The first of these theories is the 'dogma of correspondence', an idea of great antiquity. According to this the soul of a human being is a microcosm, a little universe that properly reflects in miniature the macrocosm, the great universe in which we live. Every factor in the universe has its counterpart in the soul and, by means of traditional occult practices, the magician can change the world outside himself by changing the little world inside.

The link between the inner and outer worlds is the 'astral light', an invisible but all pervading substance whose existence forms the basis of the second of Levi's dogmas. According to Levi this astral (literally 'starry') light has a close relationship to matter, each physical object having an astral twin that is, in a sense, primary – to the mage the world of matter reflects the astral world rather than vice versa. By manipulating the astral light it is possible, said Levi, for the occultist to influence both the physical universe (to tip tables or heal the sick, for example) and the feelings and modes of consciousness of other living beings.

This manipulation can be achieved by the trained human imagination and will; Levi's third fundamental theory is that will and imagination are real natural forces, capable – when properly harnessed – of producing even more spectacular effects than those produced by, say, electricity.

During his lifetime Levi's theories attracted little attention. His books sold only moderately, and he eked out a scanty living by taking 'occult pupils'. And many of his contemporaries regarded him as no more than a charlatan.

Yet he had his disciples, men and women who believed that they had learned much of value from his writings. And there are those in the late 20th century who think the same – Levi's influence has proved an abiding one. In a sense the ghost of Apollonius, raised by Levi well over a century ago, is still with us today – casting a long shadow.

Above: Levi on his deathbed in 1875. Many modern occultists still regard him as one of the world's greatest authorities on the theory and practice of ritual magic, holding in special esteem his writings on the symbolism of the Tarot cards, some of which he designed himself, such as the '14th Key of the Tarot', the card of Temperance from the 22 cards of the Greater Trumps (left). Other occultists have used it as the inspiration for their own cards, such as those designed by the early leader of the Golden Dawn, S. L. MacGregor Mathers (far left) and the modern designer Miranda Payne's pack (right)

A tale of two murders

Two murders committed in the same place on the same day, but exactly 157 years apart, with the suspected murderer named Thornton in each case – this is the bizarre Erdington affair. But was there, asks RICHARD DEACON, more than coincidence involved?

IF THE PRINCIPLES underlying astrology are correct, people born in the same – or similar – astrological conditions should have broadly similar lives. There is certainly no lack of anecdotes about people born at the same time on the same day many years apart, with the same astrological conditions prevailing at the two dates, whose lives have, indeed, revealed marked similarities.

One of the better-known examples is that of Queen Elizabeth I and the late Dame Edith Sitwell. Although they were born 350 years apart, they had much in common – even down to facial similarities. Their birth charts display many intriguing resemblances: both were born on 7 September, between 3.00 and 4.00 p.m., and both had the ascending sign of Capricorn in their horoscopes. Neither woman was welcomed into the world: Lady Sitwell, Dame Edith's mother, wanted her first-born to be a boy, while Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, suffered execution through giving birth to a daughter, as Henry VIII desperately wanted a son. Neither Elizabeth nor Dame Edith married, each wrote verse and was subject to melancholic fits.

There appears, however, to be a certain amount of evidence suggesting that not only do people who are born on dates on which the prevailing astrological conditions – the alignments of the planets – are similar suffer similar fates, but that events that occur on those dates can bear uncanny resemblances to one another. The strange case of the 'identical' Erdington murders apparently comes into this category. Two girls of the same age (and, according to some sources, the same birth dates) were the victims of murders committed on the same day of the year – but with a time difference of 157 years. The identical factors in the two cases are so striking and so numerous that it could be argued that some kind of astrological influence must have governed the actions of those who committed the crimes.

On 27 May 1817, 20-year-old Mary Ashford was found dead, apparently murdered, at Erdington, then only a village, 5 miles (8 kilometres) outside Birmingham. On 27 May 1974, Barbara Forrest, aged 20, was strangled and left in long grass near the

Far left: Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603) and the English poet Dame Edith Sitwell (1887–1964). Both ladies were born on 7 September, between 3.00 and 4.00 p.m.; both were unwanted babies, neither married, both wrote verse and each suffered from periodic fits of melancholy. There is even a marked resemblance between their faces. People born at times of similar astrological conditions are known as astrological time twins – and astrology predicts that their lives should follow broadly similar courses

children's home in Erdington at which she was a nurse.

That in itself is perhaps a remarkable coincidence, but no more. It is when one examines each case in detail that the identical factors begin to proliferate. Both in 1817 and 1974 Whit Monday was on 26 May. Barbara Forrest and Mary Ashford had both been raped before being murdered and their bodies were found within 400 yards (360 metres) of one another, death taking place at approximately the same time of day. It would appear (though there must be some doubt about this in the case of Mary Ashford) that there were attempts by the killers to hide the respective bodies. And the coincidences do not end there. Both girls had visited a friend early in the evening of the Whit Monday to change into a new dress and then go on to a dance. After each murder a man was arrested – and in each instance his name was Thornton. To round off this narrative of astonishing parallels, both men were charged with murder but were acquitted.

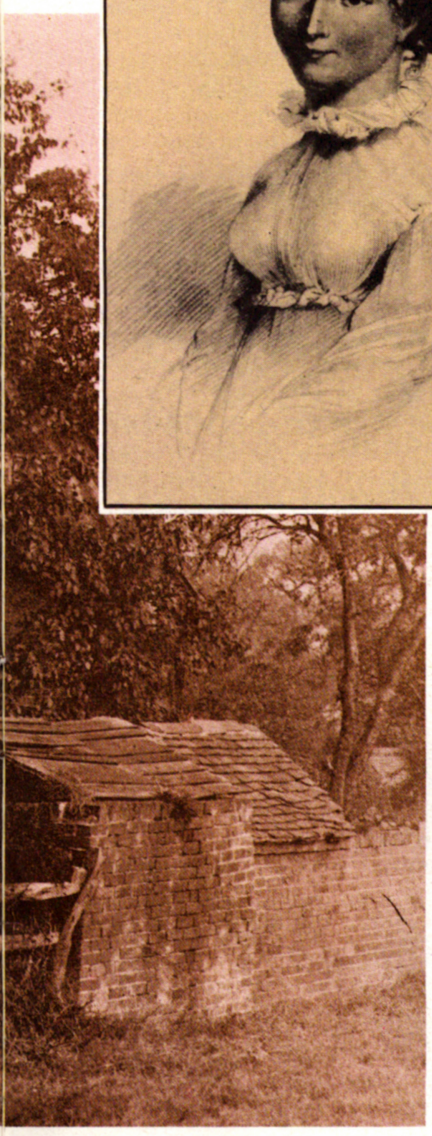
It was when the police were checking through archives after Barbara Forrest's death that they came across full reports of the murder of 1817 – and noted these similarities with amazement. At 6.30 a.m. on 27 May of that year a labourer making his way to work in Erdington found a pile of bloodstained female garments not far from Penn's Mill. He reported his find to the police and a search of the whole area was carried out. Eventually two sets of footprints, those of a man and a woman, were discovered leading in the direction of a flooded sandpit.

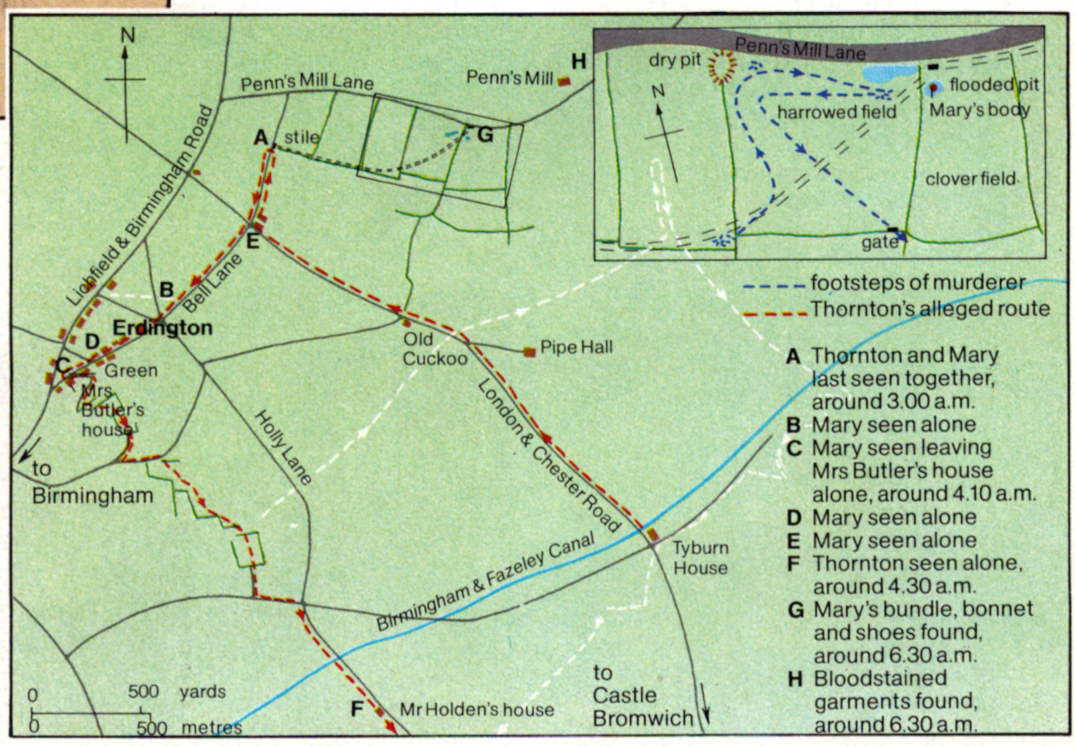
Bloodstained clothing

The footsteps ended at the edge of the water in the pit. This was searched, and the body of Mary Ashford retrieved from it. Her clothing was bloodstained and there were bruises on her arms. She was a well-known local girl, and it was not long before all her movements of the previous day were traced. On the Whit Monday, 26 May, she had travelled from Erdington to Birmingham to sell dairy produce at the market, having arranged to go to a Whitsuntide dance at the Tyburn House Inn that evening. She returned to Erdington about 6 p.m., went to a friend's house and changed into a new print dress for the dance, to which she went accompanied by a girl named Hannah Cox.

The two girls thoroughly enjoyed themselves at the dance, which ended about midnight. For most of the evening, Mary Ashford danced with a young bricklayer named Abraham Thornton. He, Mary, Hannah Cox and her partner, Benjamin

Left: a contemporary engraving of Mary Ashford, whose body was found on 27 May 1817 in a flooded sandpit close to Erdington – then a rural village, as this photograph of Mary's house (below left), taken some decades later, shows. The scene of the events of the night of 26 May 1817 (below) includes the spot on which an uncannily similar crime was committed exactly 157 years later – the Pype Hayes Children's Home, then Pipe Hall. In both cases the man accused of the murder was called Thornton – and in both cases he was acquitted





Carter, walked together towards their respective homes as far as a place known as the Old Cuckoo, a little short of Erdington village. Hannah and Benjamin then went off in another direction.

At about 3.30 a.m. on 27 May, Mary Ashford was seen walking towards the home of Mrs Butler, Hannah Cox's mother. Evidence was given that she was 'walking very slowly and alone'. Arriving at Mrs Butler's house, Mary changed her party dress for her working attire and at 4 a.m. she said goodbye to Hannah Cox and said she was going home.

Mary was seen twice more after leaving Mrs Butler's house. Joseph Dawson testified to seeing her alone at 4.15 in Bell Lane, and 10 minutes later Thomas Broadhurst swore that he, too, saw her unaccompanied in the same lane. After the discovery of her body Abraham Thornton was interviewed and questioned about the murder.

Indignant suspect

'I can't believe she is murdered,' said Thornton. 'Why I was with her until four o'clock this morning.' Although astounded to hear that Mary had been murdered, it did not dawn on him for one moment that he was suspected of having killed her.

Later that day, however, Thornton was taken into custody and searched. He admitted having had sexual intercourse with the girl, but denied rape or murder. Although medical evidence in that era could hardly be called scientific, or be compared to the forensic evidence of today, the suggestion was that Mary had been sexually assaulted.

In his deposition Abraham Thornton confirmed that he and Mary had walked home part of the way with Hannah Cox and Carter. 'When Carter and Hannah left us Mary and I walked on over the fields until we came to a stile,' he stated. 'We sat talking for about a quarter of an hour. Soon afterwards we went to the Green at Erdington where I waited outside while Mary changed her dress. But Mary did not come out of the house so, being tired of waiting, I went home alone.'

Above: Mary Ashford as she looked on the night of her murder. She attended a Whit Monday dance at the Tyburn House Inn (below), and spent the evening dancing with a young bricklayer, Abraham Thornton (above right). She left the dance in Thornton's company, and was seen several times with him before her body was found next morning

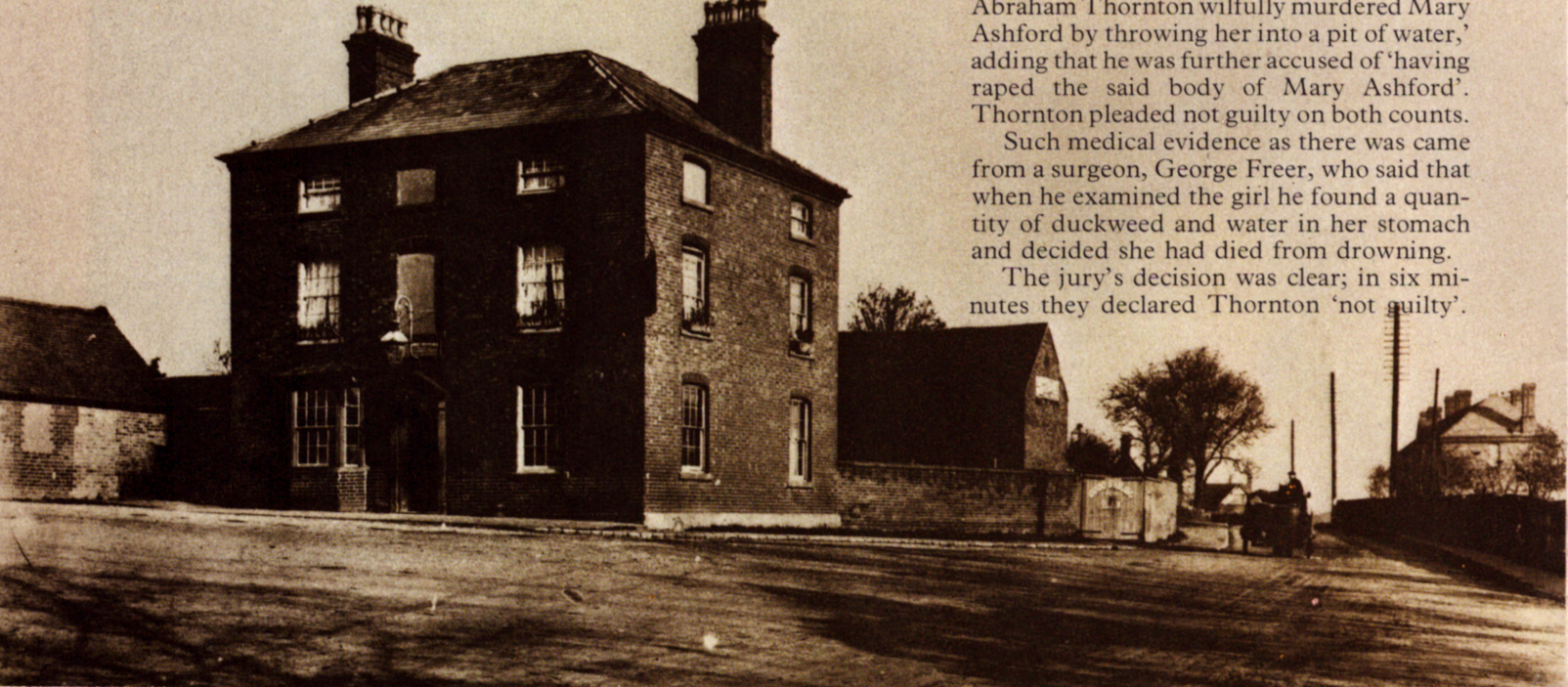
Fortunately for Thornton, there was confirmation that he was alone about this time. A Mr Holden, together with another man and woman, testified to seeing him – as, too, did John Haydon, a game-keeper, who talked to him for a quarter of an hour. Further to this testimony William Jennings, a milkman, stated that 'I saw Abraham Thornton about 4.30 in the morning, walking alone. . . .'

No one had seen Mary and Thornton together after they were sighted at 3.00 a.m. at a stile at the top of Bell Lane. The two had been seen by various people in this period, but always each was alone – they were never together. There was also the fact that the distance in a straight line from the flooded sandpit to the point where Thornton was last seen was nearly $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles (2.4 kilometres) – or, by the route Thornton himself claimed to have used, 2 miles (3.2 kilometres). This fact alone, combined with the time factor, meant that at least some of the testified evidence was false. If Thornton walked to Erdington with Mary, as he claimed, then those witnesses who asserted that they saw Mary alone in Bell Lane must have been mistaken. Equally, it was clear that if Thornton's story was to be believed, the footsteps of a man that were found leading across those fields in the direction of the flooded sandpit could not have been his. Yet the female footprints were positively identified as belonging to Mary Ashford by two workmen at the nearby mill, who removed the dead girl's shoes and measured them against the footprints.

Abraham Thornton was brought to trial in August 1817 at the Warwick Assize Court before Mr Justice Holroyd. The case attracted considerable attention and a contemporary account of the trial stated that 'by six o'clock in the morning great numbers of people had assembled before the gates of the County Hall.' The charge was that 'not having the fear of God before his eyes, but being moved by the instigation of the devil, Abraham Thornton wilfully murdered Mary Ashford by throwing her into a pit of water,' adding that he was further accused of 'having raped the said body of Mary Ashford'. Thornton pleaded not guilty on both counts.

Such medical evidence as there was came from a surgeon, George Freer, who said that when he examined the girl he found a quantity of duckweed and water in her stomach and decided she had died from drowning.

The jury's decision was clear; in six minutes they declared Thornton 'not guilty'.



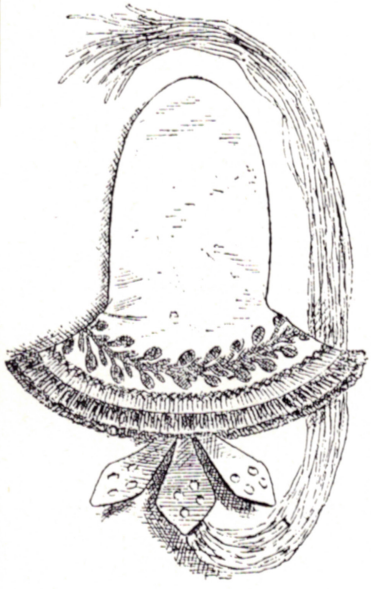
Below: Abraham Thornton's 'gage of battel'. At Thornton's trial for the murder of Mary Ashford, the jury pronounced him 'not guilty'. Mary's brother William appealed against the verdict and forced a second trial. Thornton then invoked the ancient law of 'Trial by battel', throwing down the gage of battel and declaring that he was ready to defend his innocence with his body. Ashford refused the challenge, and Thornton went free

Today that verdict would settle all arguments, but in the early part of the century, under an ancient law, it was possible for William Ashford, Mary's brother, to appeal against the verdict and so demand a second trial. This was fixed for 17 November 1817, and Thornton then appeared before Lord Ellenborough at the Court of the King's Bench. At this trial Thornton made legal history by being the last man in Britain to take advantage of an old law called 'Trial by Battel'. This involved Thornton renewing his plea of 'not guilty' and throwing down a gauntlet from the dock for the right to challenge William Ashford to trial by battle.

The law of England

'Not guilty,' Thornton declared, 'and I am ready to defend this plea with my body.' Thereupon Ashford's counsel disputed Thornton's right to trial by battle, claiming that it was 'an obsolete practice, which has long since been out of use'. But Lord Ellenborough ruled that it was 'the law of England'. If Ashford had picked up the gauntlet, the two men would have fought with weapons until one was beaten, or gave in. If Thornton had lost, he would have been executed immediately. If he had won, he would have been freed. Having had no response to his challenge by 21 April 1818, Thornton was formally discharged. He later emigrated to the United States.

The mystery of Mary Ashford's death lies not so much in the fact that her killer was never discovered as in the – admittedly remote – possibility that this might not have been a case of murder. On the other hand Barbara Forrest's death seems quite definitely to have been caused by strangulation. Her body, also partly clothed, was found hidden by long grass in a ditch some eight days after she disappeared. She had worked at the Pype Hayes Children's Home; Michael Thornton, a Birmingham child care officer, who also worked as a supervisor at the home, was charged with her murder.



At the trial in March 1975, Mr Justice Croom-Johnson ruled that there was insufficient evidence to continue the trial and directed the jury to find Thornton not guilty. Despite the fact that the prosecution had had the entire seven months during which Thornton had been kept in Winson Green Prison to prepare its case, it was unable to offer any positive evidence against him.

There is one dissimilarity between these two so similar murders that is, curiously, extraordinarily striking. Mary Ashford's body was found within a few hours, although Erdington was then a village and her body was hidden in a flooded sandpit. Yet, while Erdington today is a built-up area of Birmingham, it took more than a week before Barbara Forrest's body was found in the ditch. And there are two other strange features of these cases. Although there is, of course, no photograph of Mary Ashford, sketches of her drawn after the celebrated trials suggest a marked resemblance to Barbara Forrest. A fellow worker with Barbara Forrest also declared that about 10 days before Barbara was murdered, she was heard to say: 'This is going to be my unlucky month. I just know it. Don't ask me why.'

Is this case simply a question of an extraordinary series of coincidences, or could it be that the astrological conditions on 27 May 1817 and 27 May 1974 somehow caused the murders of the two girls? To follow this hypothesis too far leads quickly to absurdities. But the 'twin' Erdington murders remain enigmatic – and not, quite, dismissible as mere coincidence.

Right: Barbara Forrest, who was murdered 157 years to the day after the murder of Mary Ashford in 1817. The man charged with her murder was also called Thornton. Was this mere coincidence – or were the two murders somehow caused by the prevailing astrological conditions?

Many locations have been suggested as possible sites of Atlantis. A well-known psychic and a scholar concur in placing it on the islands of Bimini in the Bahamas. JOHN STEELE gives an account of their theories

Atlanti

THE CONTROVERSIAL LEGEND of Atlantis is known to every culture that borders the Atlantic Ocean. The Greek philosopher Plato, writing in the fourth century BC, described Atlantis as an island empire of great wealth and military power that sank beneath the waves around 9500 BC (see page 461). According to Plato, Egyptian priests kept written records of the lost continent on the walls of a temple at Saïs. It is generally felt, by those who believe in the legend, that Atlantis lay in an S-shaped curve parallel to the African coastline, reaching from the Azores to Ascension Island, with the mid-Atlantic ridge forming its mountainous backbone. As late as AD 400 Marcelino, a Roman historian, writes that the educated people of Alexandria talked about the destruction of Atlantis as if it were a fact. The Mayas, Aztecs, Gauls, Carthaginians and Basques all record tales of land masses that mysteriously and cataclysmically disappeared. Many respected archaeologists and historians have rejected the Atlantis legend as a baseless myth and assume that they have written definitive perspectives of history. They disdain even to contemplate a revision of their chronologies because it would cast doubt on all their ideas about Man's technological and cultural advancement through the ages.

However, there are theories emanating from sources as varied as alleged psychics, historical detectives and scientific and archaeological investigations carried out over the past two decades, suggesting that part of the supposed drowned empire may have been situated in the Bahama islands. The Bahamas, a group of about 700 small islands, stretch from south-east of Florida as far as Cuba, and the Bimini islands of this group lie 50 miles (80 kilometres) east of Miami. Andros, the largest of the Bahamas, lies to the south of Bimini.

Right: the Bimini islands, which form part of the Bahamas. Some scholars and psychics have placed the site of the legendary lost land of Atlantis here; among them is Egerton Sykes (below), who based his hypothesis on a careful analysis of Egyptian and Phoenician, Greek, Roman and Celtic sources. His study led him to believe, among other things, that Murias, the mythical encircled city of the West of the Tuatha Dé Danann, early settlers of Ireland, was actually part of the Atlantean civilisation centred on Bimini

Two of the most accessible sources of information on Atlantis in the Bahamas are Edgar Cayce, the American clairvoyant known as 'the sleeping prophet', and Egerton Sykes, the eminent Atlantologist, who has spent many years researching and writing about the lost continent in his periodicals *New World Antiquities* and *Atlantis*. These two writers have produced different reasons for believing that Atlantis and Bimini are connected in some way. The question is whether or not their claims are given any substance by orthodox historians or archaeological research. Before examining this it is worth reviewing briefly the evidence for Atlantis that Cayce and Sykes offer, and their grounds for believing it.

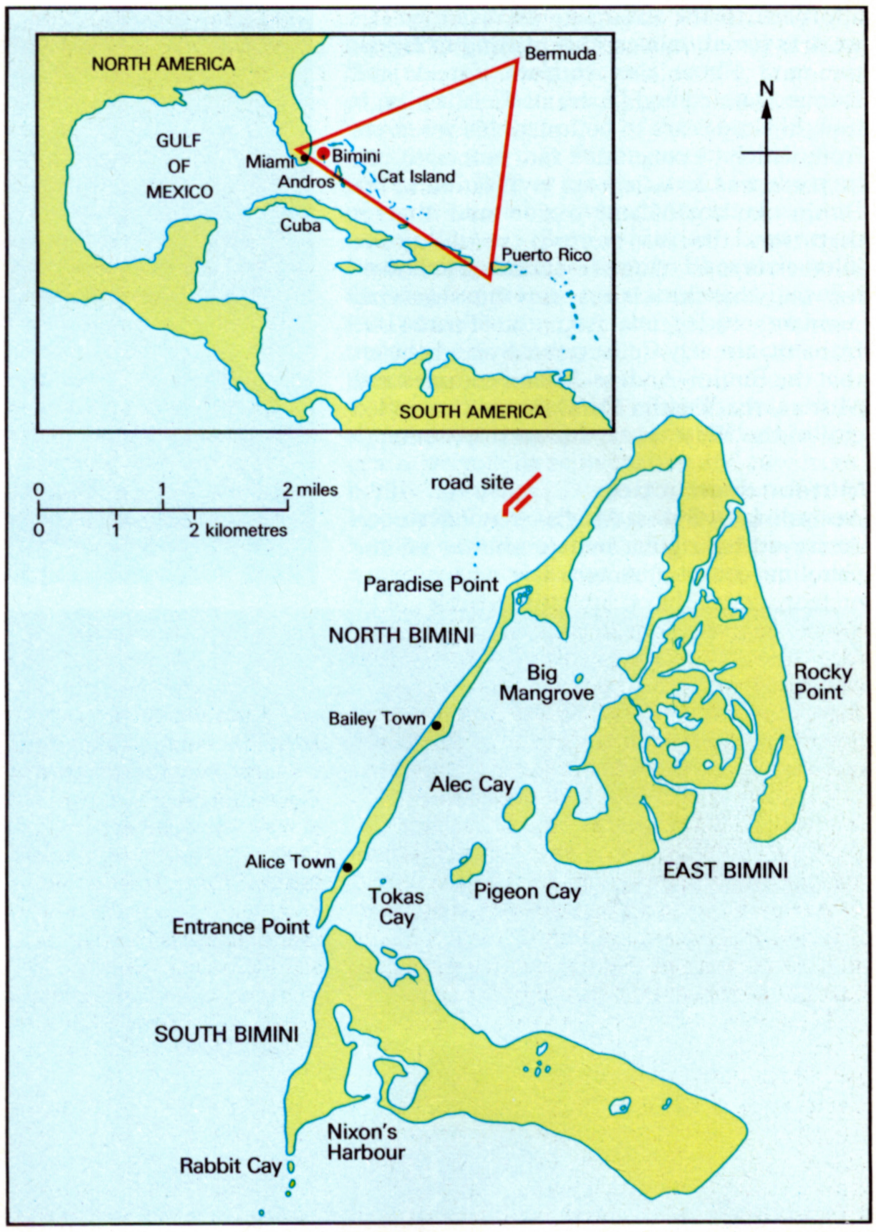
Cayce's information came to him during a state of trance, from which he also derived the thousands of medical diagnoses for which he is renowned (see page 2294). In 1933 he predicted that 'a portion of the temple of Atlantis may yet be discovered beneath the slime of ages of seawater . . . near what is known as Bimini, off the coast of Florida'. In 1940 he stated that 'Poseidia [land near

s rising

Bimini] will be among the first portions of Atlantis to rise again. Expect it in 1968 or 1969.'

To Cayce, Atlantis was a civilisation of fantastic – perhaps in more senses than one – technological advances, even 50,000 years ago – a view that may be an unconscious reflection of the futuristic predilections of the 1930s. Apparently the Atlanteans had harnessed natural atomic, solar and electrical forces, as well as tapping the Earth's natural internal gases. Sophisticated transportation and communication systems were developed. But as the laws of nature were understood and used to Man's advantage, so they became, almost inevitably, tools for destructive and manipulative purposes.

Although there is no tangible proof for Cayce's readings, it is just possible that such a civilisation could have existed. Consider that only 10,000 years have elapsed between the Neolithic revolution when Man first settled in villages, according to orthodox archaeology, and the Moon explorations of the space age. Then imagine how many 10,000 year periods there have been in the history of Man. It is not entirely unreasonable to suggest that several civilisations may have risen and fallen over this time and may be awaiting discovery beneath thousands of years of forest, silt or ocean bed.



Above: a detailed map of the Bimini islands with a smaller scale map (inset) showing the position of the islands relative to the Bermuda Triangle. Just north of Paradise Point is the configuration of stones known as the Bimini road – which, some scholars believe, provides strong evidence that an advanced civilisation, possibly Atlantis, did indeed exist off the shores of Bimini

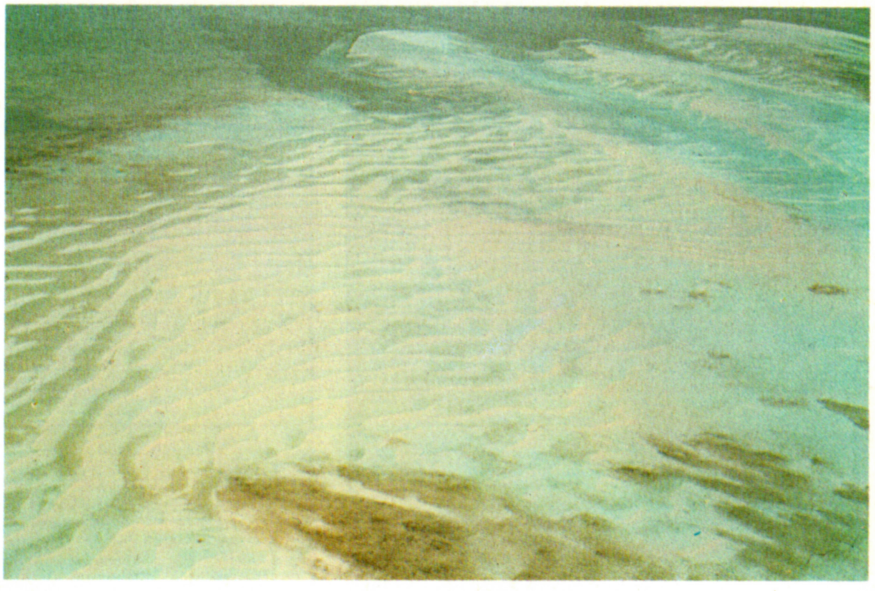
According to Cayce, Atlantis was broken up into five major islands by a massive earthquake in 28,000 BC. The largest and most advanced of these islands was called Poseidia (in the Bimini-Andros region). Around 10,000 BC there were more earthquakes in Poseidia. As volcanic eruptions became progressively worse, many of the Atlanteans emigrated to Yucatan, Peru and the Pyrenees, with the majority going to Egypt. At this time the Atlantean record-keepers made a great effort to preserve their history for future generations. Cayce tells us that three sets of records were hidden: one set was secreted in a temple in Yucatan; another was buried in the Hall of Records, a small pyramid alleged to be in Egypt's Gîza complex; and the third set was said to have been submerged with Atlantis itself. Allegedly this set was kept in the Poseidia-Bimini temple of Iltar, which Cayce foretold would rise intact.

Egerton Sykes takes a more orthodox

approach to the Atlantean civilisation. His work is based on a careful reading of Egyptian and Phoenician sources, Greek and Roman classics, and Irish and Welsh epics. It took him 25 years to complete his research, from which he concluded that before 10,000 BC there was an Atlantean civilisation in the Bimini-Andros-Miami region and that at that time the sea stopped 30 miles (50 kilometres) east of its present margin. Drawing on what he claims are the surviving remnants of legends from the Tuatha Dé Danann, an early Celtic tribe, Sykes believes that the Bimini-Andros-Miami complex and Murias, the Tuatha Dé Danann's encircled city of the West, were one and the same.

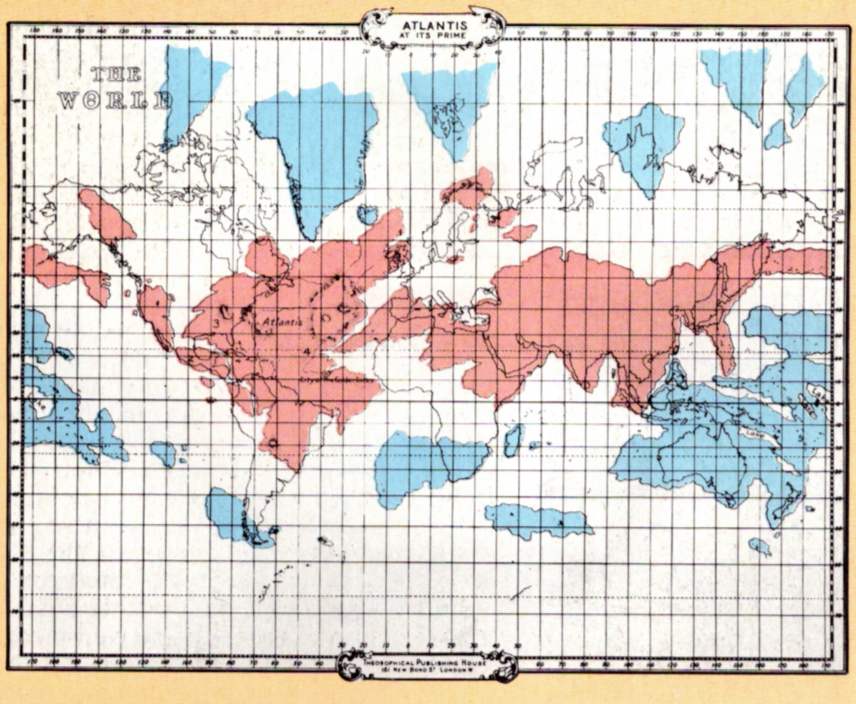
Meteor destruction

According to Sykes, Murias may have been destroyed by a great meteor shower off the Carolina coast of America – where many meteor crater bays are still visible. The largest meteor, which Sykes calls the Bal meteorite, may have been more than a mile (1.6 kilometres) in diameter and he claims that, if it existed at all, this particular meteorite could even have been as big as the one that constitutes the Cheam nickel mine in Ontario, Canada, which is $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles (5.6 kilometres) in diameter. Sykes's theory is that the combined shock waves of this meteor strike could have caused the mid-Atlantic ridge section, on which Atlantis may have lain, to become submerged under a torrent of water that resulted in the Atlantic Ocean as we know it today.



Above: the sand banks around Bimini. The sea-beds under the shallow waters that surround Bimini allegedly hide the remains of Atlantis. According to the American psychic Edgar Cayce, Atlantis was destroyed by an earthquake in 28,000 BC. Most surviving Atlanteans fled to Egypt

From historical readings and more recent excavation of remains near Bimini, Sykes conjectures that the Bimini temple did indeed survive the meteor disaster because it stood on the top of a hill, at the same time as speculating that the as yet unverifiable parent city of Murias was in a valley and so destroyed. Gradually the temple is said to



Deeper and deeper

One strongly anti-establishment and pro-Atlantean group is the Occult Popular Front. This group believes that it is a fact beyond dispute that Atlantis played an important role in the process of evolution. Occultists attack generally accepted methods of gaining knowledge about prehistory, claiming that any idea derived through Man's senses or reasoning is untrustworthy, and that the only truth lies in the Akashic Records, a mystical store of historical information (see page 353). Madame Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy (see page 2061), writes of a group of occultists studying the problem of Atlantis that they maintain that 'at different epochs of the past, huge islands, and even continents, existed where now there is but a wild waste of waters. In these submerged temples and libraries the archaeologist would find the materials for filling in all the gaps that now exist in what we imagine is *history*.'

W. Scott-Elliot, a disciple of Madame Blavatsky, propounded an intricate history of the races of the world, all of which he believed to be descendants of the Atlanteans. He even produced a map to show how the world had looked 'after the catastrophe of 80,000 years ago and up to the final submergence of Poseidonis in 9,564 B.C.'. The Popular Front's view of Atlantis suggests that that civilisation had a science based on psychic powers, gas-bombs, high explosives, transport by airship, sexual equality and co-education. And finally, the inhabitants were immensely rich.

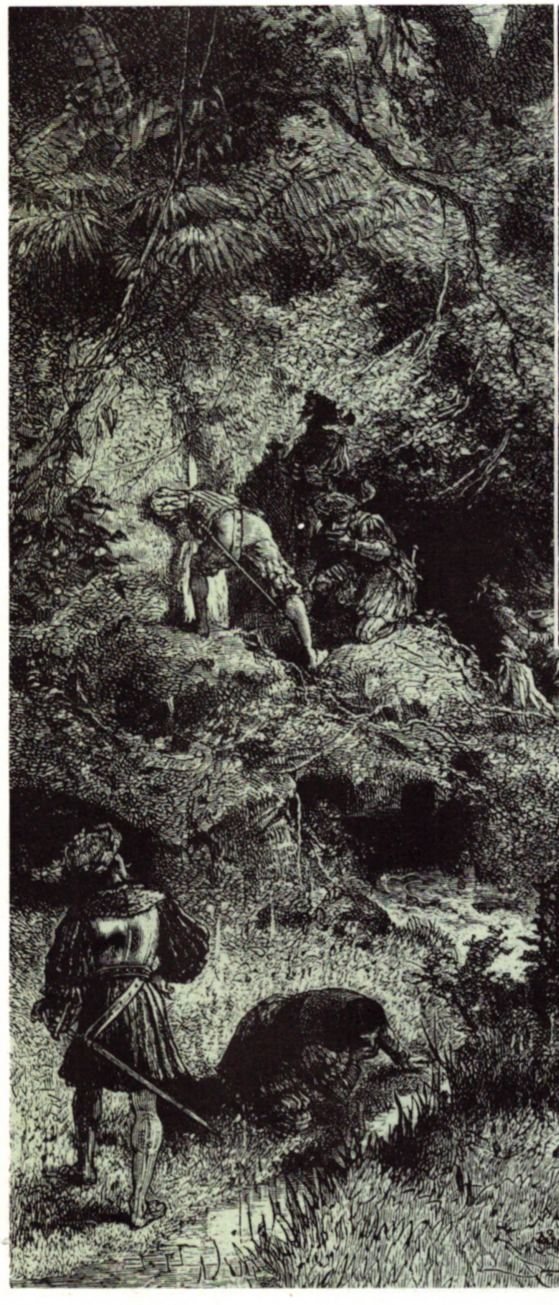
have been restored to its original function as a religious and administrative centre. To Sykes, Atlantis was much like Plato's Atlantis: a very early high civilisation in the classical tradition of Athens and Rome. Unlike Cayce, he does not believe that the Atlanteans had a very high level of technological skill, maintaining that our current technological culture is the only one the world has ever seen.

Until about 3000 BC Bimini was visited by many people from the Old World, including Etruscans, Minoans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Basques, Bretons, Celts and the odd Norseman. The prime reason for these pilgrimages was to search for the alleged Fountain of Youth. Other lures were the temple's treasures, which Sykes thinks included the crystal skull, found in 1927 by the daughter of the explorer F.A. Mitchell-Hedges in British Honduras (see page 756).

Below: the Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León searches for the mythical Fountain of Youth in Miami, Florida, in 1513. Legend has it that the main temple of Atlantis was a centre of healing where it was possible to regain one's youth as well as to obtain cures for disease. A West Indian legend recorded in the 16th century tells of a Fountain of Youth situated on an island to the north. And in 1975 a group of explorers led by Dr David Zink (below) used modern scientific techniques to seek – and, they believe, find – the Fountain of Youth

The Egyptians were the most likely organisers of the first transatlantic voyages to Bimini, and their records would seem to suggest that Bast, the Egyptian cat goddess, was at one time the god of the temple. Sykes also theorises that Bimini was named after the Bennu Bird or phoenix and Min the god of youth – both Egyptian divinities of rejuvenation. Later Bimini-Murias became a Phoenician centre. Egypt, Phoenicia and Carthage appear to have alternated in political domination over the temple without making any changes in its sanctity or function.

Regardless of which divinity was worshipped at the temple, it remained a healing centre promising rejuvenation and ease from bodily ailments. It is not known if the Fountain of Youth was an actual spring, healing baths or medical elixir, but travellers continued to visit the temple up until the



birth of Christ. The 16th-century Spanish explorer Fernando De Soto told of a West Indian legend about a Fountain of Youth on an island to the north. By the time that Juan Ponce de León arrived in 1513, landing in Miami instead of Bimini, the temple had already been submerged for many centuries.

The remarkable thing is that these two opposing research techniques – on the one hand Cayce's reportage of information gleaned from a trance, on the other Sykes's theories deduced from years of painstaking study – both point quite clearly to the existence of an Atlantean community near Bimini. Is this any more than a peculiar coincidence? As it happens, archaeological discoveries of the 1970s have seemed to strengthen these psychic and historically speculative arguments.

Underwater ruins seem to point to the existence of Atlantis in the Bahamas. *See page 2594*

The seeing ear

Of the hundreds of millions of Chinese alive today it would be odd if some did not display unusual talents. But is it true that some strangely gifted children can read using their ears – and other parts of their bodies?
PAUL SIEVEKING reports

A 12-YEAR-OLD CHINESE BOY called Tang Yu was playing one day when he stumbled against a bystander. The boy said that, although only his ear touched the man's pocket, he was able to 'read' the brand name on a packet of Flying Wild Goose cigarettes in his breast pocket. To test the boy's claim, another man wrote a word on a sheet of paper and crumpled it into a ball. The boy placed the wad of paper next to his ear and after a while told the man what he had written on it.

The local paper, the *Sichuan Daily*, published an article about Tang Yu's talent in March 1979. It was severely criticised in Peking for publishing 'unscientific nonsense', and the mass media were advised to refrain from following up similar stories. One paper even accused little Tang Yu of sneaking a look when he performed these feats. It was recalled that a similar stir had been caused in the 1940s when the Chinese press carried a story about a girl, also in Sichuan, who was capable of surviving without food for several months. The story proved to be a fake: the girl was eating in secret.

This time, however, once the first report had gained currency, many others began to surface in different parts of the country. The political climate was right for speculation about the world of the paranormal: there was widespread talk of seeking truth empirically and not blindly following the party line.

Above: the front cover of the Chinese journal *Nature* of April 1980 showing just some of the children said to be able to 'see' with their ears, fingers and even armpits. This trend in psychic abilities began in 1979, when 12-year-old Tang Yu (bottom right of picture) stumbled against a bystander and found he could read the name on a cigarette packet in the man's jacket pocket – with his ear. It seems that Chinese scientists are taking such claims seriously and are strenuously investigating them under strict laboratory conditions

Most of the reports involved children who were supposed to be able to 'read' not only with their ears but with the tops of their heads, their armpits, pigtails, buttocks, feet and so on. Many of the children were said to have more than one such paranormal faculty. A 25-year-old woman was found who, it was claimed, could read simultaneously and without confusion with five parts of her body; and a girl of nine was said to be able to read with 10 parts of her body.

Chinese historians found similar reports in classic works written over 2000 years ago. The Shanghai scientific journal *Nature* argued the validity of such phenomena in a series of 10 articles. For the rest of the year ESP became a major topic of conversation, not only in tea house gossip but also within the country's leading scientific and medical research establishments.

In an effort to determine the validity of these claims, scientists and doctors performed hundreds of tests on these gifted children. The most elaborate were organised in Shanghai by *Nature* from 4 to 10 February 1980. There were 14 subjects, aged between 9 and 25. They were tested before 10 audiences, totalling more than 2000 scientists, doctors, teachers and journalists, and the proceedings were filmed by the Shanghai Science and Education Studio. There was a holiday atmosphere at the tests, coinciding as they did with the Chinese spring festival.

The test subjects were seated in the centre of the hall. Behind each of them stood a monitor to minimise the possibility of trickery. Members of the audience left the hall, wrote words or pictures on sheets of paper, folded the papers, placed them in heavy paper bags or plastic boxes and then returned to the hall where they presented them to the children, who examined them using their own particular methods. The expressions of the children differed widely: some closed

their eyes, some bowed their heads, others smiled or looked shy.

Little Jiang Yan was the star of the test on 6 February. Her performance almost brought the house down, according to the report in the Hong Kong newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* (31 July 1980). Her clear Peking accent rang from the loudspeakers: 'Mine is a cluster of yellow bananas painted on a green background!' She had 'read' this picture with the tip of her finger, with which she was allowed to feel about in a cloth sleeve. The six children tested on that day were given three papers each to 'read'; the results were 17 correct out of 18.

Telepathic armpits?

Much attention was focused on two young Peking sisters, Wang Qiang and Wang Bin. Not only could they read with their ears and armpits, but if one sister placed a message under her armpit, the other could read it telepathically.

In addition to being tested before large audiences, the 14 youngsters were also examined by a team of 30 experts and scholars in various fields. Some had been sceptics before the tests, but changed their minds afterwards. Among the converted was Wu Xueyu, director of the eye, ear, nose and throat hospital of the Shanghai No 1 Medical College. 'I surrender,' said the 70-year-old doctor. 'There is no arguing with facts.'

The Chinese-American physicist Dr Chih Kung Jen was among a team of specialists who conducted tests on 12 psychic children in the autumn of 1980. The children achieved a 98 per cent accuracy in 'reading' concealed messages with parts of their bodies. When holding the wrapped paper, he said, 'the children told us they experienced both a warmth and a tingling sensation in their hands – like pin-pricks – and that the sensation travelled along the nerve lines of their bodies to their heads.'

Above: Lai Shi-Lung, professor of medicine at Canton Medical College and (right) Cyrus Lee, a Chinese American. Lai Shi-Lung is engaged on research into 'EHBF' – extraordinary human body functions – and is concentrating mainly on eyeless sight. Cyrus Lee is a professor of psychology who has done much to make the Chinese research on EHBF known in the West

Some scientists had some singularly unenlightening ideas to offer by way of explanation, according to Meng Dongming, a reporter with the official *Worker's Daily*: 'Most researchers tend to the idea that the skin of people with these sorts of abilities gives off a certain kind of radiation which can pass through objects and relay information back to the body for interpretation by the brain.' He quoted a professor as saying that the basis of the strange powers was that 'thoughts have substance.'

Chen Shouliang, dean of natural sciences at Peking University, studied a group of 40 children around the age of 10, picked at random. He was able to develop extra-sensory powers in 16 of them. He concluded that extra-sensory perception is a latent human ability.

Professor Wang Chu, deputy director of the department of radio engineering at the same university, reported on the descriptions given by the children he had studied with Chen Shouliang. At first, the children say, the image appears in their minds as a disordered jumble of dots and lines, which gradually rearrange themselves until the picture becomes clear. According to Chen and Wang's study, the faster this process takes place the more likely the child is to get the correct answer. The process speeds up as the child becomes more experienced in the use of the special sense, and is also influenced by the state of the child's health.

When the sisters Wang Qiang and Wang Bin returned to Peking after the Shanghai tests, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Institute arranged for an expert in *qigong* to train them. *Qigong* is literally '*ch'i* work', *ch'i*

Right: Tu Ping and Tu An, a sister and brother who attend a primary school near Wuhan University, mainland China, take part in an eyeless sight experiment. With their sight effectively blocked out they were asked to 'read' objects at a distance and have shown marked telepathic abilities. Here Tu Ping gleefully describes the target object – only five seconds after the beginning of the experiment

being 'breath', 'inner power', or non-muscular energy (see page 181). It is the energy that flows along the acupuncture meridians, and is developed by practitioners of the 'internal schools' of martial arts, the most well-known of which is *t'ai chi chuan*. *Ch'i* masters are said to have extraordinary powers – 'rooting' to the ground and resisting massive efforts to push them over; repulsing attacks by means of an invisible force; transmitting a surge of energy, resembling electricity, or a strong magnetic attraction; and so on. One master, out walking in the street with a friend, is said to have been hit in the back by a pedicab, which rebounded 10 feet (3 metres) and tipped over. The master, without a break in the conversation, walked on as if nothing had happened. There are also accounts of masters projecting *ch'i* beyond the body to ring bells and snuff out candles at a distance. (See page 2410.) Was this power used by two girls in Yunnan Province, discovered at the beginning of 1981, who could make tree branches break and flowers bloom, allegedly?

As a result of their *qigong* training, the armpit-reading sisters Wang increased their already remarkable powers. During tests, they were able to indicate the location of scars on the body of a fully clothed person and successfully described the shape of a pendant hidden under the clothing of another.

Related observations have been reported involving an 11-year-old boy, Xie Zhaohui. Doctors said he had the ability to describe, without touching a patient, the position of a foetus in the later stages of gestation, whether the liver is grossly inflamed as compared with a picture of a normal liver, and whether a fracture is simple or compound.

Another 11-year-old, Wei Ruoyang, appears to have even more highly developed 'x-ray' vision. 'Researchers took him to a reservoir near Peking and asked him to indicate the location of underground water pipes,' according to Meng Dongming of the *Worker's Daily*.

The places he pointed to corresponded

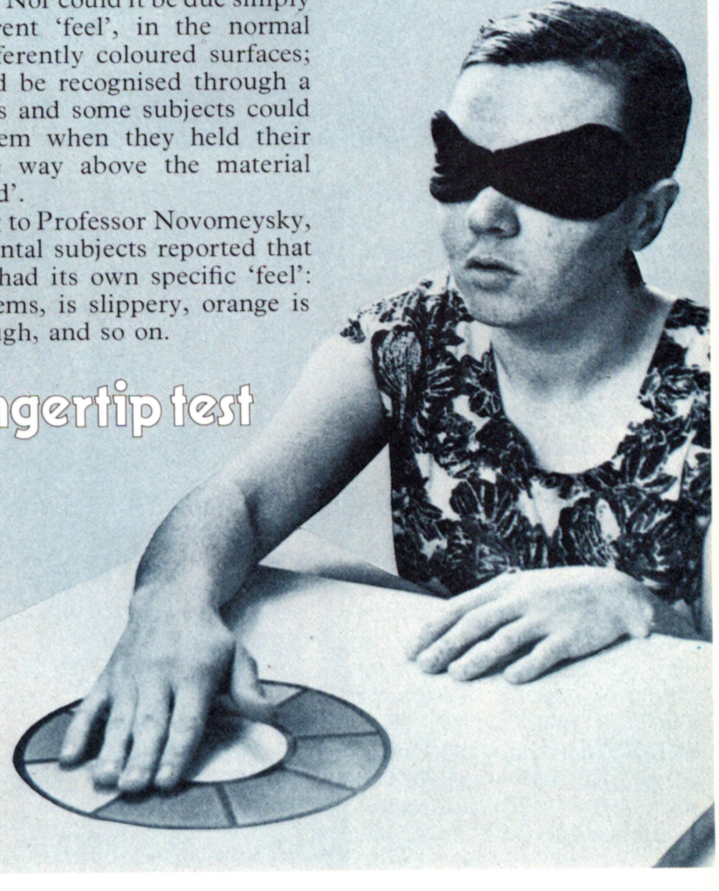
The ability to 'see' with parts of the body conventionally reserved for other functions is accepted as real by many scientists in the Soviet Union. Like the Chinese researchers, they have put a great deal of effort into studying the faculty, and there have been public demonstrations by gifted people. One of the most famous is Rosa Kuleshova, who is allegedly able to recognise colours through her fingertips (right). She told this to her doctor in her home city of Takil, in the Urals, in 1962. Her demonstration so impressed him that he reported her abilities to colleagues, including Professor Abram Novomeysky, who began to study her intensively. At first only two fingers of Rosa Kuleshova's right hand were sensitive; with training, both hands and other parts of her body, including the elbow, became able to 'see'. She became so adept she could 'read' print (above).

Even more excitingly, Novomeysky found that many people can develop similar abilities. Some could begin to distinguish colours within half an hour of making their first attempts. Other Russian workers began to train blind people in the skill of 'skin vision' and reported great success.

Experiment ruled out the possibility that the skin vision is due to telepathy or clairvoyance. Nor could it be due simply to the different 'feel', in the normal sense, of differently coloured surfaces; colours could be recognised through a sheet of glass and some subjects could recognise them when they held their fingers some way above the material being 'viewed'.

According to Professor Novomeysky, his experimental subjects reported that each colour had its own specific 'feel': yellow, it seems, is slippery, orange is hard and rough, and so on.

The fingertip test



Left: Zhen Xiao-hui and her mother at their Canton home. The little girl has shown remarkable powers of EHBF, especially reading with her fingertips

exactly with the locations as shown in official maps. Then they took him to the tombs of the Ming Dynasty emperors, to the north of Peking, and he correctly pointed to the location of two of the hidden entrances to one of the tombs. He also described the internal arrangements of another of the tombs, Chang Ling, but, as the tomb has not been opened by archaeologists, it is not possible to check at present whether or not he is right.

Strange powers everywhere

The *Taiyuan City Daily* reported in March 1981 that over 100 children with unusual powers had been found in the city. The paper claimed:

> Some children with supernatural powers develop from being able to read with their ears to having x-ray vision, telepathic powers, telescopic vision, and the ability to open locks, peel oranges, open and close flowers with the power of their thoughts alone.

Zheng Rongliang, visiting professor of biophysics at Johns Hopkins University in the United States, witnessed many psychic feats by Chinese children.

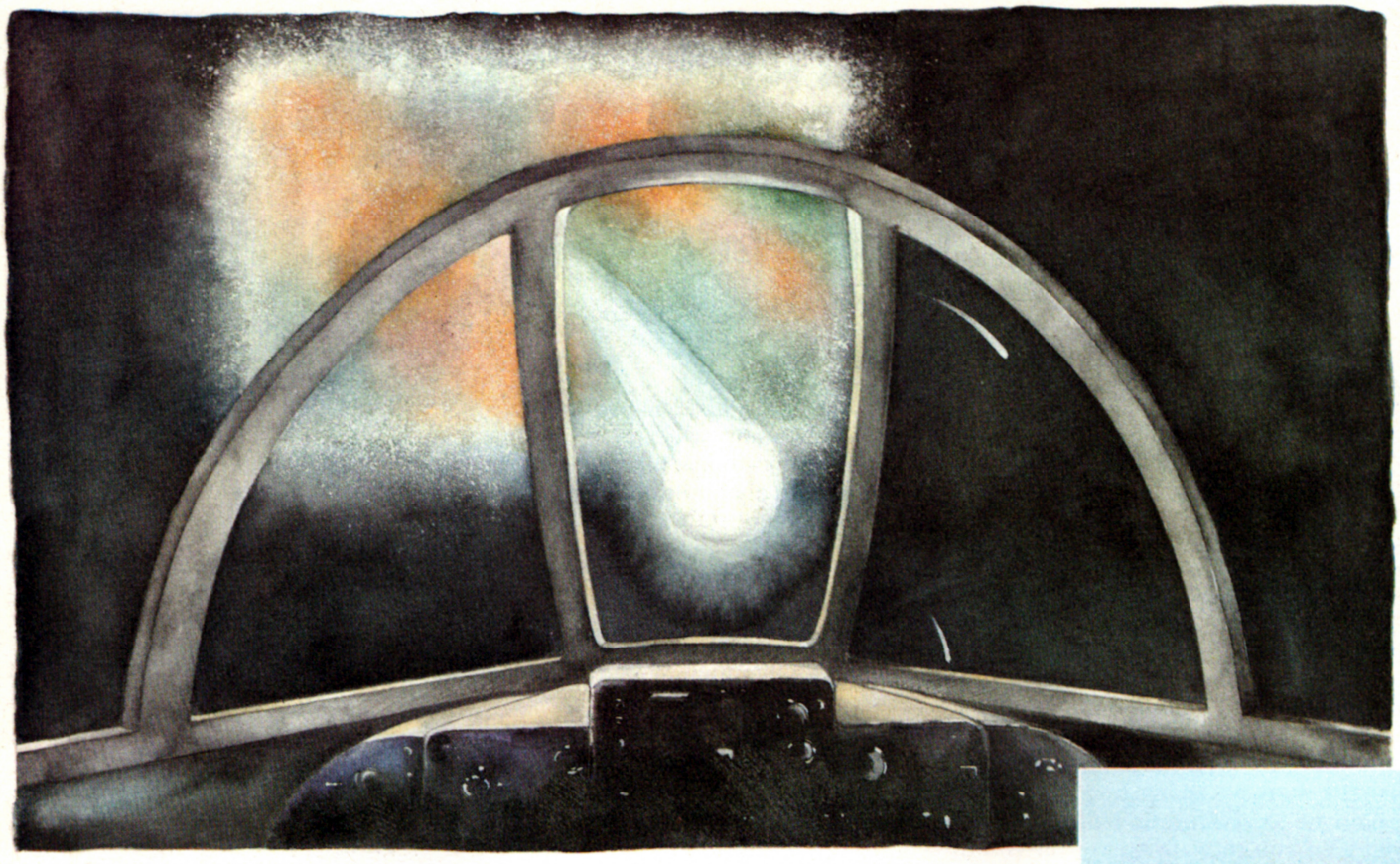
> In February of this year [1981] I attended a scientific conference in Shanghai in which 14 of the children demonstrated their really extraordinary abilities. In one demonstration, a young boy and girl sat holding stems with unopened flower buds in their hands. After about 20 minutes of concentration by these two subjects, these buds opened to reveal yellow blossoms. . . . A 12-year-old boy showed us he could use his mind power to make a watch or clock run faster or slower at will. A 12-year-old girl named Chen Yi opened a lock which had been sealed inside a box along with its key. Chen Yi placed her hand upon the sealed box for about 20 minutes, then declared: 'The key is now floating inside the box! Now the key is going into the keyhole and is turning the lock over.' When the box was opened, the key was indeed in the lock and the lock had been opened. . . .

In the autumn of 1981 the *Shanghai Wenhuibao* quoted Yu Guangyuan, vice-chairman of the National Science Commission, as saying that the ear-reading (and related) stories were 'ridiculous propaganda' and that such things had long been a popular 'magic trick' in China. It is true that cautious commentators have pointed out that parapsychological researchers must be conversant with the tricks of the illusionist's trade: if a professional magician can duplicate a feat, then paranormal ability in achieving it cannot be regarded as proved.

On the other hand, is it likely that such a large number of young children from all over China would be skilled in the techniques of the stage magician?

Below: a group of psychically gifted children from Shanghai who demonstrated their bizarre talents to a group of visiting Americans, including parapsychologist Dr H. E. Puthoff, who cautiously reported this experience to the SPR conference at Cambridge in 1982

To assess the truth of the bizarre stories that emerged from China until 1981, when the authorities clamped down on them, is even harder than it is in the case of similar reports in the West. We must be grateful that we have been allowed even to glimpse this much of paranormal happenings in that country. It may be that the authorities will again relax their control on the reporting and investigation of strange events – more and more of what was once anathema is coming to be permitted or even encouraged. If they do, it will certainly show that in China there is an abundance of weird, wonderful and unexplained events that do not sit comfortably with orthodox scientific views.



Beyond our scope?

Can UFOs become invisible to radar? When they do appear on radar screens, why is it more likely to be at night than during the daytime? JENNY RANDLES ends her series on radar and the UFO by considering these and other baffling problems in the field

IF UFOS ARE MATERIAL PHENOMENA, rather than purely psychological ones, then they must be detectable by suitable types of radar on some occasions – *unless* they are some kind of advanced machine capable of becoming invisible to radar. Aircraft that are difficult to detect by radar *are* being developed. One is the US Air Force's B-1 bomber, which is designed to have the smallest possible radar reflective surface. But what if some governmental agency had perfected radar invisibility? Lord Hill-Norton, former Admiral of the Fleet and a member of the House of Lords all-party UFO study group, has suggested to the author that such a development could explain the secrecy of governments over the UFO mystery.

This speculation could make sense of a curious aspect of the data on UFO radar cases. The noted UFO researcher Dr J. Allen Hynek has pointed out that nocturnal lights figure among the cases more frequently than they do among UFO cases in general. Hardly any of them concern daylight sightings of apparently solid or structured objects.

It might be that the only material phenomenon that gives rise to UFO reports occurs in the form of a night-time light, all the other cases being exaggerations, errors, hoaxes, delusions and so on. Or, following Lord Hill-Norton's line of thought, an intelligent agency in possession of radar invisibility techniques may use them during daylight to

Right: a Boeing B-47 jet bomber. One night in 1957 an RB-47 reconnaissance variant of this aircraft repeatedly observed flying mystery lights that seemed to be associated with an object *emitting* radar waves

Left: the UFO interception over Iran in September 1976. One of the two Phantom jets involved closed in on the UFO, which consisted of multicoloured flashing lights. A smaller light suddenly emerged from the UFO and seemed to approach the aircraft. The pilot attempted to fire a missile at the UFO in reply – but lost all power to his communications and weapons control panel

Above: a Phantom jet fighter in the colours of the Imperial Iranian Air Force – the type of aircraft involved in the UFO incident of September 1976

Left: the B-1 supersonic bomber, designed to be difficult to detect by radar. Its body is slender to present as small an area as possible, it is contoured to scatter radar waves rather than reflect them back to the ground radar stations, and radar-absorbing materials are used whenever possible

avoid detection, but not employ them as frequently at night, when there is less chance of being seen.

A number of truly baffling radar-visual cases are on file. One occurred in September 1957 and involved a US Air Force RB-47 bomber flying from a base in Kansas with an experienced crew of six. During one part of their flight they were apparently tailed by an incredibly manoeuvrable UFO. It appeared and disappeared at whim. The pilot, aptly named Chase, did just that, making his aircraft plunge after the object but not being able to match its performance. The story continued as the aircraft flew across the southern states. Ground radar tracked the UFO for an hour or so. The RB-47 was carrying some electronic countermeasures (ECM) gear, highly advanced for the time. Its function in time of war was to detect radar pulses from enemy ground radars. This equipment detected a source of radar-like waves, and tracked its apparent motion. The crew became convinced that the ECM equipment, operated by a crewman deep in the belly of the aircraft, was tracking the same object that the pilot and copilot could see.

Dr James McDonald, a professor of atmospheric science at Arizona State University, concluded that this case was quite inexplicable 'in terms of present-day science and technology'. The University of Colorado study group described the case as 'unusual, intriguing and puzzling'.

But even what seems to be the most rock-solid of UFO cases can be undermined by a determined and sceptical investigator. Philip J. Klass, after lengthy study of the case, claims that the ECM operator was actually detecting a ground radar station, and that the pilot and copilot successively misinterpreted a meteor, an airliner coming in to land, and bright stars as the visible UFO. The UFO subcommittee of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics found Klass's explanation of the radar evidence plausible, but his conjectures about the visual sightings hard to accept.

Together with the Lakenheath/Bentwaters case (see page 198), this ranks as a thoroughly investigated, yet baffling, radar-visual case. These two incidents alone might be sufficient to suggest the existence of a strange phenomenon, though nothing beyond the bounds of a peculiar *natural* event is proven. That is why Peter Warrington, the UFO radar specialist, and the author have advocated the use of the phrase UAP (unidentified atmospheric phenomenon) for this kind of event, rather than UFO, which for many people has acquired strong connotations of intelligent control.

A UFO interception

Military cases of this type from Britain and the United States have completely dried up – according to official sources. It seems a reasonable suspicion that such cases have not stopped occurring but now simply have a 'higher classification' – that is, are kept more secret.

In other countries with a more open-minded attitude to the UFO question, there have been several striking radar-visual cases. The UFO interception by two Iranian Air Force Phantom jets in September 1976 is one such incident. This object apparently interfered with the electrical systems of the pursuing aircraft (see page 972). A full account of the events of that night merits a place in

this discussion of radar-visual cases.

The mystery object had been seen by civilians and military personnel on the ground and both pilots saw a brilliant light in the sky. One got a radar fix on it and began to close in on it. At this point the pilot got his best view of the object, as a sequence of multicoloured and flashing lights. Then it accelerated away with the Phantom struggling to keep pace. Suddenly a small object emerged from the UFO and made straight for the jet. Not surprisingly the Iranian pilot interpreted this as a hostile act and attempted to launch an air-to-air missile. But at that moment he lost the power to his communications and weapons control panel, though not to his other controls.

The ejected object was still heading towards the fighter. Instinctively the pilot turned his aircraft into a steep dive and tried to shake off what looked alarmingly like an enemy missile. This had no effect: the small object changed course to continue its intercept path. But then it changed its course again, circled round the aircraft and travelled back to rejoin the parent UFO. At that moment the pilot regained the failed power supply.

Maintaining admirable composure, the pilot returned to the pursuit. On his radar he watched the object's manoeuvres mirror those that he could see. He had no doubt that the object was very real. Then a second 'missile' was ejected, this time heading straight for the ground. It appeared to land, and poured out a brilliant flood of light, illuminating the ground for a long way around. The UFO meanwhile accelerated to several times the speed of sound, leaving the Phantom behind and giving the pilot no option but to give up and return to his home airfield.

At dawn a helicopter team was sent to the place where the 'missile' had landed. The missile was not there and there was no sign that it ever had been.

A classic saucer

If the pilots' account of this case is accurate, it admits virtually no other explanation but the existence of a fantastic aerial machine. This was clearly no UAP but a classic 'flying saucer'. Certainly the United States government took this story very seriously: the Defense Intelligence Agency, the CIA and the State Department, among others, reported on it. One intelligence officer described it as 'an outstanding report'. It is thanks to the Freedom of Information Act that all this has been revealed. Yet the United States government still tries to convince us that it does not believe UFOs are worthy of investigation.

In Spain the authorities have begun to accord great respect to UFOs. In November 1979, for example, Mirage jets were scrambled to chase a UFO that had been seen and also detected on several radar systems. The object flew so close by a civilian passenger jet that the pilot became alarmed for the safety of his aircraft and made an emergency landing. The story made headlines around the world. A major government investigation ensued and the Spanish Minister of Transport was quoted as saying 'It is clear that UFOs exist.'

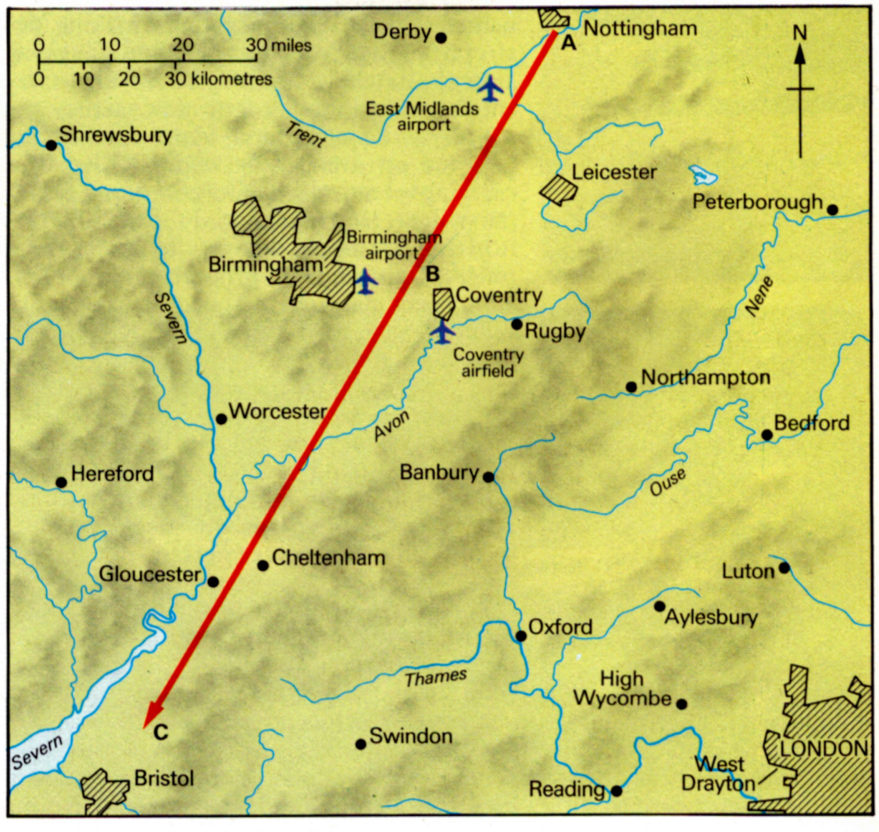
In the light of the Spanish case and many others, this statement seems wholly reasonable. Unfortunately, British authorities have not conceded as much.

On the night of 1 April 1980 a civilian radar operator at Birmingham Airport tracked an object moving across country on a south-westerly course, at a steady speed of a mere 44 miles per hour (71 km/h). (It was *not* following the wind direction.) A light aircraft saw the object and described it as 'like a car headlight shining through mist'. The radar operator says that other radar systems tracked this object, but none admitted it; they referred enquirers to West Drayton, the Civil Aviation Authority centre where all British reports of radar anomalies are sent – and the authorities at West Drayton would say nothing.

The object in this case may have been some unusual military craft. But the highly experienced radar operator said: 'For the first time in 20 years I was stumped for an explanation.' The inconclusive result of the follow-up investigation shows just how difficult the analysis of radar reports can be. Radar evidence is not, unfortunately, a talisman for the ufologist, but as complex and ambiguous in its interpretation as any other kind of report with which the investigator must deal.

Further reading

Allan Hendry, *The UFO handbook*, Sphere 1980
Jenny Randles, *UFO reality*, Hale 1983
Jenny Randles and Peter Warrington, *UFOs: a British viewpoint*, Hale 1983



The path of the UFO that was tracked across western England on 1 April 1980. The civilian radar operator at Birmingham Airport claimed that the East Midlands airport first detected it at A and reported it to him. The object flew south-west extremely slowly and was seen by a light aircraft at B. The Birmingham operator tracked it as far as C. Other radar systems detected it, he claims – but none of their staff would admit it. The report of the incident was passed to West Drayton air traffic control centre, where it is now hidden behind official silence

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
The article 'In search of Harry Price' (in issue 99 of *The Unexplained*, page 1974) claims that Helen Duncan did not actually produce spirit forms from out of her mouth, but that she was simply regurgitating pieces of cheesecloth that she had previously swallowed. The article also points out that this 'fraud' was only uncovered when flashlight photographs of these 'spirit forms' were closely examined.

In view of this claim I think that it is very important that you know about an experiment carried out by the late Maurice Barbanell, a leading authority on Spiritualism and the supernormal, to disprove the idea that Helen Duncan swallowed and later regurgitated cheesecloth.

Barbanell explained, both on BBC Radio 4 and in the newspaper that he edited, *Psychic News*, how 'we had X-rays taken by a doctor to prove that she had a normal oesophagus and could not have swallowed that amount of cheesecloth. A medical friend, Dr Margaret Vivian, said I should ask her to swallow harmless methylane tablets. This would dye the whole contents of her stomach blue. Helen agreed to do this, as did all the sitters. But the ectoplasm she produced was still snow white, dazzlingly so. There was no trace of any blue.'
Yours faithfully,
Alan Minchin Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

Dear Sir,
Bob Rickard gave a very good account of fish falls in his article 'When fish fall down like rain' (*The Unexplained*, issue 8) and said that the most common explanation was that the fish had been picked up by a whirlwind. As some researchers have doubted the whirlwind theory, and as there are few reports of showers of fish (or even anything else unusual), I would like to tell you about some cases that I have recently discovered.

I came across the first incident several years ago in a book entitled *The excitement*, published in Edinburgh in 1830. It mentions a voyage through the Straits of Malacca, apparently about 1760. 'They were surrounded with water spouts, one of which was very near, and they fired to disperse it. The roaring was tremendous, and presently a torrent of water poured on the ship, which brought down with it many fish and seaweeds.'

Just after Bob Rickard's article appeared I discovered another reference to a 'fish-whirlwind', this time in *Whitaker's Almanac*, 1937. It was probably quoting *The Times* of 23 January 1936, which reported: 'Violent whirlwinds accompanied a storm which broke over Florence on Monday, and among various objects which were seen spinning in the air were some big fish which had evidently been drawn out of the River Arno.'

In the *Journal of Meteorology* (December 1981) Dr Terence Meaden (Director of the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation) reported four similar cases, the first three of which all occurred in Britain: two crabs were alleged to have fallen near Swansea on 27 September 1981; four crabs fell near Canterbury on 19 July 1829 during a local hurricane; a tornado and fish-fall occurred near Jedburgh in Scotland in September 1838; and a waterspout off Hong Kong on 29 September 1930 deposited seaweed and fish on land.

Finally, not long ago I had a letter published in the *Manchester Evening News* appealing for reports of whirlwinds. I received a reply from an E. Singleton reporting one at Newton-le-Willows, near Bedale, North Yorkshire in about 1947, which sucked fish up out of a lake. 'I saw flocks of birds suddenly appear from behind me. Looking back, the reason was obvious, for approaching rapidly was a whirlwind which was carrying all sorts of debris. I threw my two children to the floor and lay on top of them while the wind passed by about 30 yards (27 metres) away. It travelled directly over a huge pond, which was locally known as "Thompson's Pit". Half the water and fish, frogs and weeds were carried away and later found on house tops half-a-mile (800 metres) away . . . we have laughed about it since, but at the time it was a most frightening experience.'
Yours faithfully,
Mike Rowe Southampton

Dear Sir,
I thought that you would be interested in hearing about a most peculiar experience that my father had in the Second World War.

He was in a convoy of trucks carrying troops and supplies through France. He himself was driving the ammunition truck. They had been on the go for a couple of days and had had no sleep and very little rest. The commander in charge eventually decided that they had reached a comparatively safe place where they could stop for a couple of hours. None of the troops, however, was allowed out in case the enemy suddenly attacked, so all the men slept where they were – in the trucks.

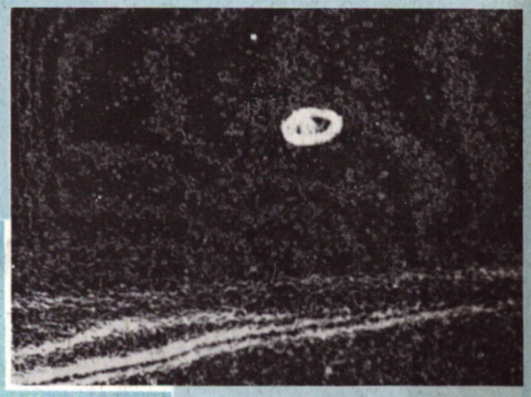
They had been resting for about an hour when my father was suddenly awakened by someone shouting in his ear to 'get the truck out of here, quickly'. He drove off at speed but after a couple of hundred yards suddenly realised that he was the only one who had obeyed the order to move out. While he was wondering why this was the case he saw two Messerschmitts coming directly towards the convoy through a gap in the nearby hills. The planes attacked the convoy and then flew off. Several men died and three of the trucks were put out of action.

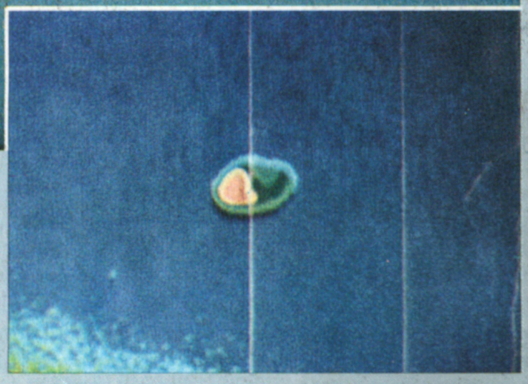
The commander then came over to my father and asked him why he had suddenly driven off, since he could not possibly have seen the two planes coming for them. When my father replied that he had been ordered to, his commander was quite amazed because no one had given any such order. When they walked back to the rest of the convoy they saw a small bomb crater exactly where his ammunition truck had been.

If he had not heard this 'order' to drive off, the ammunition truck would undoubtedly have been blown up and there would have been many more, and even worse injuries.
Yours faithfully,
Chris Ross Hove, Sussex

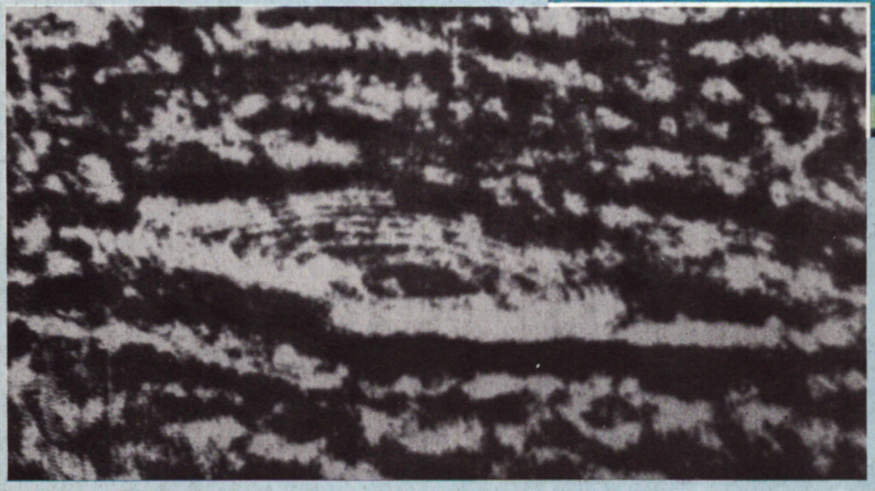
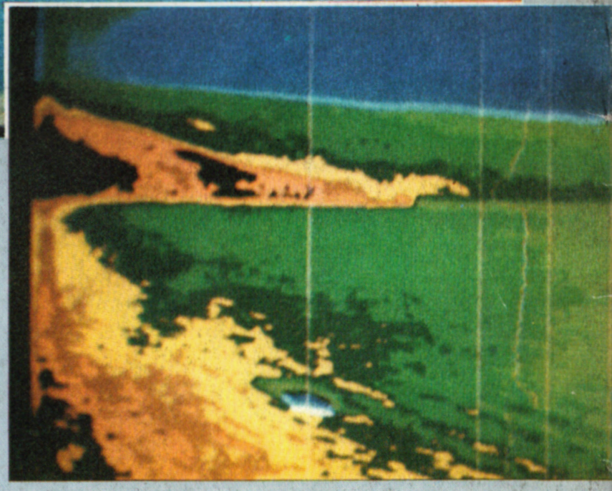
Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

The object of the exercise





An alleged UFO and a disturbance in Loch Ness appear in the last photographs to be featured in this series of reports. The pictures were analysed by Ground Saucer Watch in the United States

P. Bruce, a reader, claimed to have taken this picture (above left) in Portugal in July 1980. GSW reports that the blurring of the object is due to its motion. The shadows on the object, as they appear in the photograph and in a computerised version (left), are consistent with those on the ground. However, when processed by the computer in a different way (above), the picture reveals that the object is probably within 30 feet (9 metres) of the camera. GSW conclude that the object is a small model, thrown by hand

Ian Rendall, a 14-year-old reader, was on a bus on the north-western shore of Loch Ness when he took this picture (right) of a disturbance on the water. R.J.W. Gardiner of the Loch Ness and Morar Project later estimated that it was 100 to 150 yards (90 to 140 metres) away and 10 to 15 feet (3 to 4.5 metres) across. GSW, by studying computerised images including a colour-contoured version (below right), ruled out the possibility that the apparent disturbance was a reflection in the bus window, or a blemish in the film. One image (below left) clearly shows a vortex: a whirlpool, GSW conclude